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SUBJECT: LEBANON: COUNCIL DIVISIONS HARDEN ON UNSCR 1701
IMPLEMENTATION AMIDST LEBANESE POLITICAL CRISIS

¶1. (SBU) Summary. During closed UNSC consultations on March 10, senior UN Secretariat officials reported that the continuing Lebanese political crisis had blocked meaningful progress on UNSCR 1701 implementation. They praised continued UNIFIL-LAF cooperation; noted the significant increase in Israeli overflights which they said violated UNSCR 1701 and undermined the GOL, LAF and UNIFIL; and reported that recent Israeli information on cluster bombs in south Lebanon is of "very limited value" and does not/not satisfy the SYG's request for detailed strike data. Although UNIFIL General Graziano did not brief member states, he did respond to questions. He praised the LAF, although he noted its need for assistance; lauded the tripartite mechanism between the UN, LAF, and IDF; and expressed hope that Israel would soon accept UNIFIL's new plan to facilitate IDF withdrawal from the northern part of the village of Ghajar (which is north of the Blue Line and in Lebanese territory). In his intervention, Amb Khalilzad expressed concern about Syrian obstruction of the Lebanese presidential election and decried continuing political assassinations. He expressed deep concern about illegal arms transfers from Syria into Lebanon, called on Hizballah to disarm, and for border delineation between the two countries. He also welcomed a follow-on mission by LIBAT and criticized Hizballah for its failure to provide any information about the abducted Israeli soldiers.

¶2. (SBU) Summary cont'd. Although all other delegations called for an early resolution to Lebanon's political crisis, Russia criticized the U.S. naval deployment near Lebanon as a "negative" example of foreign interference in Lebanese affairs. Despite Israeli charges of UNIFIL negligence in the face of Hizballah re-armament in south Lebanon, nearly all delegations voiced general support for UNIFIL, and several member states expressed satisfaction with the situation in south Lebanon. The issue of reported illegal arms transfers from Syria to Lebanon generated the most controversy during the consultations. Although European delegations expressed concern about violations of the arms embargo, Libya, South Africa, and Russia attacked the veracity of Israel's allegations and directly or indirectly criticized the Secretariat for including them in the SYG's report. Several

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delegations, including Russia, did support a follow-on visit by LIBAT. Most delegations explicitly called on Israel to cease its overflights of Lebanon and criticized Hizballah for its failure to provide proof of life or release the abducted Israeli soldiers. Many delegations called on Israel to withdraw from Ghajar and to provide the SYG with the required information on cluster bombs immediately. Discussion of the Sheba'a Farms was muted, with European delegations calling for greater progress on the issue, and South Africa and Libya repeating old arguments about Israeli occupation of the area.

On next steps, DPA Under Secretary-General Pascoe said the UN is waiting to hear the reaction of the GOL and GOI to the UN's provisional geographical definition. End Summary.

13. (SBU) COMMENT AND ACTION REQUEST: After assessing the consultations, the French delegation shared with USUN and the UK Mission a draft of a Presidential Statement (PRST) on UNSCR 1701, to be issued as soon as possible. (Note: E-mailed to IO/UNP, NEA/ELA, and L. End Note.) Based on the conflicting views of the situation presented during the consultations, the French proposed that the PRST be as short as possible, and reaffirm the importance of full implementation of UNSCR 1701 and Council support for UNIFIL. The French did not/not address the specific issues of UNSCR 1701 -- illegal arms transfers, disarmament, overflights, cluster bombs, Sheba'a -- expecting that Council delegations would deadlock over how to characterize these issues. USUN shares the French assessment that we are highly unlikely to reach agreement on a comprehensive PRST, and recommends favorable consideration of the French draft.

Secretariat Laments Lebanese Political Crisis

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14. (SBU) Briefing the Council at the start of consultations, DPA U/SYG Pascoe and DPKO A/SYG Mulet reported that the continuing Lebanese political crisis had blocked meaningful progress on UNSCR 1701 implementation. (Note: Transcripts of their remarks were e-mailed to IO, NEA, and L. End Note.) Although they said the prevailing calm in south Lebanon was a "major success," especially in light of the increased burden on the LAF across the country, they warned that this "relative calm" is still threatened by hostile elements. Despite bellicose rhetoric from Hizballah, Pascoe expressed hope that recent statements by the group that it does not want war with Israel are sincere, but said actions on the ground must match words. Turning to UNIFIL issues, Mulet

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said UNIFIL and the LAF have established at least two co-located checkpoints along the Litani river, and plan soon to operate them 24 hours a day. He decried the 282 Israeli overflights in February (compared to 40-50 per month over the past year) as violations of UNSCR 1701. In a view echoed by many delegations, Mulet said the overflights undermined the authority of the GOL, LAF, and UNIFIL. While Mulet noted that the IDF had recently provided new information on cluster bombs in south Lebanon, he said they were of "very limited value," and repeated the SYG's request for detailed strike data. On LIBAT, Pascoe said the Secretariat is now discussing terms of reference for a follow-on visit with PM Siniora, but suggested the team would focus on assessing Lebanon's border management capacity and put forward additional ideas to implement LIBAT recommendations.

15. (SBU) Although UNIFIL Force Commander General Graziano did not brief Council members, he did respond to questions at the end of the briefing. Recalling that UNIFIL's "end state" is to strengthen the LAF so it can manage without international assistance, he praised the force, suggesting that "no other army could have done better in the situation." He called for member state assistance to the LAF, and said he would report his assessment of specific LAF needs to UNSC Ambassadors in Beirut, noting the force is short of food, fuel, ammunition, and training. On overflights, Graziano recalled that although he always tells the IDF that overflights are violations of UNSCR 1701 and cannot be justified by reconnaissance needs -- especially the recent overflights by fighter planes -- the IDF always insists that it will continue its overflights until the two abducted soldiers are released and its security needs are addressed. Graziano praised the tripartite mechanism, noting that the three sides meet monthly and seem to treat the meetings with importance, and that the exchanges appear to have increased mutual trust.

But he lamented lack of progress on Ghajar, noting that it is a "very sensitive" issue and that Israel's continued occupation of the northern part of the village is a violation of UNSCR 1701. Graziano said UNIFIL had developed a new proposal to resolve the issue, in which the IDF would withdraw and UNIFIL would police the town, and the LAF would not enter it until the three sides had agreed on the necessary details. He said the GOL had accepted the new UNIFIL plan and expressed hope that Israel would soon do the same.

U.S. Highlights Arms Transfers and Disarmament

16. (SBU) Amb Khalilzad expressed concern that Syria and its allies were using preconditions to block presidential elections in Lebanon, and noted that until a new president takes office, the U.S. fully supports the legitimate and democratically-elected GOL. He decried the continuing targeted attacks in Lebanon over the past three months, including the attack against the Embassy Beirut vehicle. Turning to UNSCR 1701 implementation, Amb Khalilzad reiterated deep concern about illegal arms transfers across the Syrian-Lebanese border, recalled Hizballah's statements that it has re-armed, and underscored the need for the disarmament of all militia in Lebanon. He called on Syria and Iran to respect the arms embargo in UNSCR 1701. Expressing concern about PFLP-GC and Fatah al-Intifada positions along the Syrian-Lebanese border, Amb Khalilzad called for full border delineation between the two countries. He welcomed the SYG's proposal to send the LIBAT team back to Lebanon, commended UNIFIL for its efforts to carry out its mandate, and called for greater international support to the LAF. Amb Khalilzad also urged greater trilateral efforts on Ghajar, unexploded ordnance in south Lebanon, and the marking of the Blue Line. He decried Hizballah's refusal to provide any information about the abducted Israeli soldiers and called for their immediate and unconditional release.

Elections: Support for Arab League and GOL

17. (SBU) Despite universal calls for an early resolution to Lebanon's political crisis, member states offered different opinions on the nature of foreign interference in the electoral process. Several delegations, including France, the UK, Croatia, Burkina Faso called for immediate elections, expressed support for the Arab League plan, and underscored their support for the "legitimate" GOL under PM Siniora until a new president takes office. The UK and Croatia criticized Syria for obstructing the electoral process and called on the Syrian Government to support a consensus Lebanese president. Russia, however, argued that Lebanon's political crisis could be resolved only by the Lebanese themselves without any

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foreign interference -- and cited the U.S. naval deployment off the coast of Lebanon as such an example of a counter-productive "demonstration of force." Citing the "negative reaction" by all Lebanese parties, including PM Siniora, to the U.S. deployment in "Lebanese territorial waters," Russian PR Churkin said the deployment recalls difficult historical memories. South Africa said it would be "imprudent" for any international parties to interfere in internal Lebanese politics.

South Lebanon: Satisfaction with UNIFIL

18. (SBU) Despite Israeli charges of UNIFIL negligence in the face of Hizballah re-armament in south Lebanon, including an informal briefing by visiting Israeli officials to Council members on March 5, nearly all delegations voiced general support for UNIFIL, and several member states expressed satisfaction with the situation in south Lebanon. France and Croatia said they were pleased with the "new strategic

reality" created by UNIFIL in south Lebanon, and praised LAF-UNIFIL cooperation and joint patrols. But they criticized recent Hizballah statements, especially those threatening open war against Israel after the assassination of Imad Mugniyeh, and argued that the UNSC had an obligation to respond. Although Italy acknowledged that attacks against UNIFIL mean there are still unauthorized armed elements in the AOR, it welcomed comments in the SYG's report that UNIFIL has found no evidence of new arms or military infrastructure (introduced after the August 2006 war) in south Lebanon. In light of Israeli allegations and hostile statements by Hizballah, Italy called for increased international support for UNIFIL. Libya expressed regret that the SYG's report had tried to "blame Lebanon" for the launching of two rockets against Israel on January 8, 2008, despite a joint LAF-UNIFIL investigation that showed the "Israeli claims were false." Libya also argued that IDF allegations about Hizballah training had not been confirmed.

Arms Transfers: Source of Major Disagreements

¶9. (SBU) The issue of reported illegal arms transfers from Syria to Lebanon generated the most controversy during the consultations. While France called for respect for the arms embargo in UNSCR 1701, after expressing concern about Hizballah statements that it has re-armed, the UK and Croatia went further in criticizing Syria for complicity in these transfers. Croatia argued that while the GOL should increase its capacity to control its border, this does not diminish Syria's responsibility. China said arms transfers merit the UNSC's attention and took note of the various letters sent to the Council and the SYG (from Israel, Lebanon, and Syria) in this regard. Libya, South Africa, and Russia attacked the veracity of Israel's allegations and directly or indirectly criticized the Secretariat for including them in the SYG's report. Describing any arms "smuggling" as simply "criminal" in nature, Libya said the SYG should treat them the same way as inadvertent crossings of the Blue Line by shepherds. It added that neither the GOL nor LIBAT had confirmed any reports of arms smuggling. South Africa argued that the reports of illegal arms transfers should have accompanied by evidence, and criticized the SYG for presenting "mere allegations" that are detrimental to peace and security in the region. The South African PermRep further asserted that Israel raises these allegations, which are then investigated by the UN and "found to be false." Russia, although it said it was interested in any information on arms smuggling, emphasized that the UNSC should work only the basis of "confirmed data."

LIBAT: Support for a Return Trip

¶10. (SBU) Several delegations either took note of or expressed support for the SYG's intention to send a follow-on LIBAT mission to Lebanon. In this regard, France said it was waiting for "gestures from Syria" to fulfill its LIBAT requirements. Italy and the UK welcomed the good work by the GOL in implementing its LIBAT recommendations and welcomed a follow-on mission. Indonesia took note of the SYG's intention to dispatch a new team. Russia, which argued that effective border management should be carried out by Lebanon but that Syria could contribute as well, said it awaits more information on the border from the new LIBAT team. Indonesia said it took note of the Secretary-General's views on the matter.

Overflights: Familiar Criticism

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¶11. (SBU) Nearly all delegations explicitly called on Israel to cease its overflights of Lebanon, which they said were undermining UNIFIL's role, and which they characterized as

violations of both Lebanese sovereignty and UNSCR 1701. The European delegations gave Israel the gentlest treatment, with the UK, Croatia, and Italy making only passing references to overflights. France, recalling that the goal is to strengthen the GOL's control of its territory, expressed concern that the overflights undermined the GOL. Belgium called first for their reduction and then their elimination. Libya criticized the "deliberate, dangerous, and continued air violations, on a daily basis, including those targeting UNIFIL." South Africa said violations of UNSCR 1701, including both overflights and statements by Hizballah threatening war with Israel, undermine trust and implementation of the resolution. Russia, Indonesia, and Vietnam condemned the overflights as affronts to UNIFIL and UNSCR 1701. Panama asked the Secretariat whether it had discussed alternatives to overflights with Israel; Graziano said no.

Ghajar: Calls for Israeli Withdrawal

¶12. (SBU) A majority of delegations addressed the issue of Ghajar, and in so doing, called on Israel to withdraw from the part of the village in Lebanese territory forthwith. Belgium emphasized the need to resolve the issue of Ghajar quickly to demonstrate progress in implementing UNSCR 1701. Italy suggested that UNIFIL should play an active role in resolving the issue, possibly by stationing troops there as an interim measure. Indonesia criticized the "Israeli occupation" of Ghajar as a violation of UNSCR 1701. Russia called on Israel to withdraw immediately from the Lebanese portion of the village.

Cluster Bombs: IDF Maps Are Inadequate

¶13. (SBU) After DPKO A/SYG Mulet's description of the new Israeli information on cluster bombs as constituting "limited value," Libya, France, Belgium, South Africa, Vietnam, Indonesia, Costa Rica, and Panama expressed concern about the lack of progress on this issue, and called on Israel to satisfy the SYG's request for detailed strike data.

Soldiers: Calls for Hizballah Action

¶14. (SBU) Most delegations criticized Hizballah's refusal to even provide proof of life for the abducted Israeli soldiers and called for their immediate release. Libya supported the SYG's comments on the prisoner issue, referring to both the Israeli soldiers and Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel. The UK, Italy, and Croatia expressed regret about the lack of progress on the prisoner issue and called on Hizballah to take action. Vietnam, on the other hand, expressed concern about the fate of Lebanese prisoners in Israel.

Sheba'a Farms: Muted Support for 7-Pt. Plan

¶15. (SBU) The issue of the Sheba'a Farms did not receive as much attention during the consultations as it has during past discussions of UNSCR 1701. France reiterated its support for the SYG's call to find a solution to the issue, and welcomed Syrian willingness to begin delineating its northern border with Lebanon. French PR Ripert also called on all parties to work with the SYG on the basis of the GOL's seven-point plan. Libya argued that delineation of borders can be accomplished only by bilateral agreement between Syria and Lebanon after an end to Israeli occupation. Belgium said the UNSC should support the SYG in moving forward with the seven-point plan while focusing on disarmament as well. South Africa repeated its position that the Sheba'a Farms is occupied territory from which Israel should withdraw immediately. In response to a question from Panama on the status of the issue, DPA U/SYG Pascoe said the UN is awaiting a formal response from the GOL and the GOI on the UN's provisional geographic definition.

KHALILZAD